



**Testimony by the Connecticut State Medical Society
House Bill 6616
Human Services Committee**

**An Act Concerning Expansion of Husky Health Benefits
To Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status**

February 14, 2023

Senator Lesser, Representative Gilchrest and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee, on behalf of the physicians and physicians in training of the Connecticut State Medical Society (CSMS), thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on **House Bill 6616, An Act Concerning Expansion of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status**.

CSMS advocates on behalf of Connecticut's physicians, to help them provide the highest quality care to their patients. CSMS also advocates on behalf of patients for a better healthcare system. As such, CSMS believes in the best possible health care for all patients in Connecticut, regardless of immigration status and supports the concepts contained in House Bill 6616.

That said, we would be remiss if we did not remind this Committee that *coverage does not equal access*. It is no secret that Connecticut's Medicaid physician network is not adequate to provided coverage to even the *current* population of enrollees. Wait times to see a specialist are long, primary care is scarce and mental health care is nearly impossible to obtain. In order to accommodate and care for a new influx of Medicaid patients, Connecticut first needs to take steps to bolster our Medicaid physician network. Key to achieving a more robust Medicaid physician network is in an increase in physician payment rates. Many physician specialties have not seen an increase in Medicaid payment rates in well over a decade. This is leading to more physicians dropping out of the Medicaid network and new physicians not enrolling in the network. Physicians want to provide medical care to *all* patients, but they must be equipped with the tools to do so. Many physician offices are small businesses and current Medicaid payment rates are, quite often, less than the cost of care.

Research has shown that increasing Medicaid physician payment rates does correlate with greater access to medical care. In 2019, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) found that each \$10 increase in reimbursement per medical visit generated a 1.4% increase in the probability that Medicaid recipient reported a doctor visit in the past two weeks and a 1.1% increase in probability that a Medicaid recipient reported very good or excellent health.

One only needs to look to the Covid-19 pandemic to recognize that the health of Connecticut's most vulnerable patients is important to the overall health and well-being of all of Connecticut's residents. However, to provide this care, Connecticut must ensure that the Medicaid physician network is able

to support an increase in the number of patients. No one jumps without making sure that the safety net is strong. Connecticut's safety net is weak and expanding Medicaid coverage will not ensure access to health care unless steps are taken to support Connecticut's Medicaid physician network.

CSMS stands ready to work with this Committee to help create a more robust Medicaid physician network that can support increased numbers of Medicaid patients.